

Version: March 2, 2026

POL6307: Comparative Politics

Spring 2026

School of International and Public Affairs
Shanghai Jiao Tong University

Course information:

Lecture time: Thursday 10:00–11:40 am
Lecture location: New Upper East Building S202
Instructional mode: In-Person
Number of credits: 2 credits
Language: English

Instructor: [Zhenhuan \(Reed\) Lei](#)
Associate Professor of Political Science
Email: reedlei@outlook.com
Office: 206 Xinjian Building

Office hours: By email

Course Requirements.

- Participation (20%). Students will read papers before the class and actively engage in the discussion.
- Final Presentation (10%). Students will present their final project in the final two weeks. The order of students' presentation will be randomly assigned. The purpose of this presentation is to seek advice from your peers on your current (in-complete) work. After the presentation, the student should finish the term paper based on the comments obtained from his/her classmates. A student should also clearly identify the question and answer *within the first two slides* of the presentation.
- Final project (40%). Students enrolled in this course have two options for the final project. The final project is due on **July 2, 2026 at 11:59 pm**. The student is encouraged to discuss the topic with the instructor before s/he starts writing. For both options, the student should also attach a memo that summarizes the suggestions that s/he has obtained in the Final Presentation and how this new draft has dealt with these suggestions.
 - Term paper. The term paper should analyze a question related to the theme of this class. It should clearly identify a question, motivate why the question is important, summarize how this analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of this question, utilize appropriate data and methods, and interpret the results. The paper cannot exceed 35 pages (double-spaced, everything other than the Appendix is included). The style requirement is the same as that adopted by

the *Journal of Politics*.

- Research proposal. First-year or second-year Ph.D. students and others who are concurrently taking many other courses and completing the methodological training have the option of submitting a research proposal in lieu of a term paper. The research proposal should clearly identify a question, motivate why the question is important, develop theoretical arguments for the hypotheses, and summarize the research's contribution to the literature. Whenever possible, the proposal should also demonstrate the plausibility of the plan by pinpointing the data sources and performing preliminary analysis usually based on existing data. The proposal cannot exceed 25 pages (double-spaced, everything other than the Appendix is included). The style requirement is the same as that adopted by the *Journal of Politics*.
- Final exam (30%). This is an **open-book, one-hour** exam. This midterm exam covers all the materials covered in this course, with emphasis on the understanding of required readings and materials highlighted in the instructor's slides. The exam will take place in class on **June 18, 2026**.

Course Schedule

Instructions:

- There is no textbook for this course. All reading materials can be accessed through the library or will be provided by the instructor.
- Required readings are indicated with a [•] symbol. Optional readings, which are not required in any way, are marked with a [-] symbol.
- When you read a paper, try to think about the following questions.
 - Can you find any internal inconsistency in author(s)' theoretical arguments?
 - Are there any critical assumptions in the theory that the author(s) did not examine or may not be true in the real world?
 - Are there any major players ignored by the author?
 - Methodologically, is there any major problems that may overturn the results?
 - Would the results be different if we perform the same analysis in other countries?
 - Is there anything that the author(s) did not examine in the paper? Can you create a research design to further investigate such questions?

I. INTRODUCTION

Week 1 (March 5): **Introduction to the Course**

Week 2 (March 12): Concepts, Methods and Career in Comparative Politics

Required readings:

- Przeworski, Adam, and Henry Teune. 1970. *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company. (Read the Introduction Chapter)
- Deaton, Angus. 2010. "[Instruments, Randomization, and Learning about Development](#)." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 48(2): 424-55.

Optional readings:

- Brzezinski, Zbigniew, and Samuel P. Huntington. 1965. *Political Power: USA/USSR*. New York: The Viking Press. (Read the Introduction Chapter)
- Kohli, Atul, Peter Evans, Peter J. Katzenstein, Adam Przeworski, Susanne Hoebler Rudolph, James C. Scott, and Theda Skocpol. 1995. "[The Role of Theory in Comparative Politics: A Symposium](#)." *World Politics*, 48(1): 1-49.
- Przeworski, Adam. 2009. "[Is the Science of Comparative Politics Possible?](#)" *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics* (Edited by Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes). Oxford University Press.
- Munck, Gerardo L., Richard Snyder, and Gabriel A. Almond. 2007. *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics*. JHU Press.
- Sinatra, R., Wang, D., Deville, P., Song, C., and Barabási, A. L. 2016. "[Quantifying the Evolution of Individual Scientific Impact](#)." *Science*, 354(6312), aaf5239.
- Malamud, O. 2010. [Breadth versus Depth: The Timing of Specialization in Higher Education](#). *Labour*, 24(4), 359-390.

II. BASICS OF CHINESE POLITICS

Week 3 (March 19): Getting China Right

Required readings:

- Opening remarks of the "2+2" U.S.-China Summit in Alaska on March 18, 2021 [[video](#), [transcript](#)]
- Congressional Research Service. 2021. [China's Political System in Charts: A Snapshot Before the 20th Party Congress](#).

Optional readings:

- Brzezinski, Zbigniew, and Samuel P. Huntington. 1965. *Political Power: USA/USSR*. New York: The Viking Press. (Read the Introduction Chapter)
- Sullivan, Jake. 2023. "Remarks by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Renewing American Economic Leadership at the Brookings Institution." [[transcript](#)]
- Mearsheimer, John J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. W. W. Norton & Company. (Read Chapter 10 "Great Power Politics in the Twenty-First Century")

Week 4 (March 26): **One-Party State I: Division of Labor**

Required readings:

- Lei, Zhenhuan, and Haiping Xu. 2026. "Making Decentralization Work: The Party-State System and China's Economic Reform and Development." Working Paper. (I will upload the article by this week.)

Optional readings:

- Zhou, Xueguang. 2022. *The Logic of Governance in China An Organizational Approach*. Cambridge University Press.

Week 5 (April 2): **One-Party State II: Top-Down Inspections and Corruption**

Required readings:

- Chen, Ting, and James Kai-Sing Kung. 2019. "Busting the 'Princelings': The Campaign Against Corruption in China's Primary Land Market." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 134(1): 185–226.
- Wang, Erik. 2020. "Frightened Mandarins: The Adverse Effects of Fighting Corruption on Local Bureaucracy." *Comparative Political Studies*, 55(11): 1807-1843.

Optional readings:

- Liao, Xingmiu, and Wen-Hsuan Tsai. 2020. "Strengthening China's Powerful Commission for Discipline Inspection under Xi Jinping, with a Case Study at the County Level." *The China Journal*, 84(1): 29-50.
- Chen, Zhiyuan, Xin Jin, and Xu Xu. 2021. "Is a Corruption Crackdown Really Good for the Economy? Firm-Level Evidence from China." *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*, 37(2): 314-357.
- Kong, Dongmin, and Ni Qin. 2021. "China's Anticorruption Campaign and Entrepreneurship." *The Journal of Law and Economics*, 64(1): 153-180.
- Wang, Peng, and Xia Yan. 2020. "Bureaucratic Slack in China: The Anti-corruption Campaign and the Decline of Patronage Networks in Developing Local Economies." *The China Quarterly*, 243: 611-634.
- Ang, Yuen Yuen. 2020. *China's Gilded Age: The Paradox of Economic Boom and Vast Corruption*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jiang, Junyan, Zijie Shao, and Zhiyuan Zhang. 2022. "The Price of Probity: Anticorruption and Adverse Selection in the Chinese Bureaucracy." *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(1): 41-64.
- Jia, Ruixue, and Huihua Nie. 2017. "Decentralization, Collusion, and Coal Mine Deaths." *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 99(1): 105-118.

Week 6 (April 9): **Political Selection: Competence-Loyalty Tradeoff**

Required readings:

- Landry, Pierre F., Xiaobo Lü, and Haiyan Duan. 2018. "Does Performance Matter? Evaluating Political Selection Along the Chinese Administrative Ladder." *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(8): 1074–1105.
- Jiang, Junyan. 2018. "Making Bureaucracy Work: Patronage Networks, Performance Incentives, and Economic Development in China." *American Journal of Political Science*, 62(4): 982-999.

Optional readings:

- Manion, Melanie. 2023. *Political Selection in China: Rethinking Foundations and Findings*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fisman, Raymond, Jing Shi, Yongxiang Wang, and Weixing Wu. 2020. "Social Ties and the Selection of China's Political Elite." *American Economic Review*, 110(6): 1752-1781.
- Kou, Chien-wen, and Wen-Hsuan Tsai. 2014. "'Sprinting with Small Steps' Towards Promotion: Solutions for the Age Dilemma in the CCP Cadre Appointment System." *The China Journal*, 71: 153-171.
- Jia, Ruixue, Masayuki Kudamatsu, and David Seim. 2015. "Political Selection in China: The Complementary Roles of Connections and Performance." *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 13(4): 631-668.
- Jiang, Junyan, and Zhaotian Luo. 2021. "Leadership Styles and Political Survival of Chinese Communist Party Elites." *The Journal of Politics*, 83(2): 777-782.
- Manion, Melanie. 1993. *Retirement of Revolutionaries in China: Public Policies, Social Norms, Private Interests*. Princeton University Press.
- Recommended Documentary: [The Chinese Mayor](#) (BBC)

Week 7 (April 16): **Bureaucratic Responsiveness**

Required readings:

- Distelhorst, Greg, and Yue Hou. 2017. "Constituency Service under Nondemocratic Rule: Evidence from China." *The Journal of Politics*, 79(3): 1024-1040.
- Köhler, Ekkehard, John G. Matsusaka, and Yanhui Wu. 2023. "Street-Level Responsiveness of City Governments in China, Germany, and the United States." *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 51(2): 640-652. *Journal of Politics*, 79(3): 1024-1040.

Optional readings:

- Chen, Jidong, Jennifer Pan, and Yiqing Xu. 2016. "Sources of Authoritarian Responsiveness: A Field Experiment in China." *American Journal of Political Science*, 60(2): 383-400.
- Jiang, Junyan, Tianguang Meng, and Qing Zhang. 2019. "From Internet to Social Safety Net: The Policy Consequences of Online Participation in China." *Governance*, 32(3): 531-546.

- Ding, Iza. 2020. “[Performative Governance.](#)” *World Politics*, 72(4): 525-556.

Week 8 (April 23): **Lawmaking (and Policymaking)**

Required readings:

- Truex, Rory. 2020. “[Authoritarian Gridlock? Understanding Delay in the Chinese Legislative System.](#)” *Comparative Political Studies*, 53(9): 1455-1492.
- Lei, Zhenhuan, Chuan Liu, and Anchu Wang. 2025. “[From Office to Oversight: Retiring Senior Officials and Legislative Assertiveness in China.](#)” Working Paper.

Optional readings:

- Tanner, Murray Scot. 1999. *The Politics of Lawmaking in Post-Mao China: Institutions, Processes and Democratic Prospects.* Oxford University Press.
- O’Brien, Kevin J. 1994. “[Chinese People’s Congresses and Legislative Embeddedness: Understanding Early Organizational Development.](#)” *Comparative Political Studies*, 27(1): 80-107.
- Yang, Wenhui. 2023. “[Power Concentration and Bottom-up Information Flow: Evidence from Chinese Municipal Congresses.](#)” Forthcoming in *Governance.*
- Lü, Xiaobo, Mingxing Liu, and Feiyue Li. 2018. “[Policy Coalition Building in an Authoritarian Legislature: Evidence From China’s National Assemblies \(1983-2007\).](#)” *Comparative Political Studies*, 53(9): 1380-1416.

III. COMPARATIVE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND ECONOMY

Week 9 (April 30): **Regime Type and Economic Growth**

Required readings:

- Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. 2001. “[The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation.](#)” *American Economic Review*, 91(5): 1369-1401.
- Przeworski, Adam, and Fernando Limongi. 1993. “[Political Regimes and Economic Growth.](#)” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 7(3): 51-69.

Optional readings:

- Acemoglu, Daron, Suresh Naidu, Pascual Restrepo, and James A. Robinson. 2019. “[Democracy Does Cause Growth.](#)” *Journal of Political Economy*, 127(1): 47-100.
- Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. 2002. “[Reversal of Fortune: Geography and Institutions in the Making of the Modern World Income Distribution.](#)” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 117(4): 1231-1294.
- Glaeser, Edward L., Rafael La Porta, Florencio Lopez-de-Silanes, and Andrei Shleifer. 2004. “[Do Institutions Cause Growth?](#)” *Journal of Economic Growth*, 9(3): 271-303.

- Dell, Melissa. 2010. “[The Persistent Effects of Peru’s Mining Mita.](#)” *Econometrica*, 78(6): 1863-1903.
- Rodrik, Dani, Arvind Subramanian, and Francesco Trebbi. 2004. “[Institutions Rule: The Primacy of Institutions over Geography and Integration in Economic Development.](#)” *Journal of Economic Growth*, 9: 131-165.
- La Porta, Rafael, Florencio Lopez-de-Silanes, Andrei Shleifer, and Robert Vishny. 1999. “[The Quality of Government.](#)” *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*, 15(1): 222–279.
- Doucouliagos, Hristos, and Mehmet Ali Ulubaşoğlu. 2008. “[Democracy and Economic Growth: A Meta-Analysis.](#)” *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(1): 61-83.
- Gerring, John, Philip Bond, William T. Barndt, and Carola Moreno. 2005. “[Democracy and Economic Growth: A Historical Perspective.](#)” *World Politics*, 57(3): 323-364.

Week 10 (May 7): **Modernization Theory and Its Empirical Assessments**

Required readings:

- Lipset, Seymour Martin. “[Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy.](#)” *American Political Science Review*, 53(1): 69-105.
- Przeworski, Adam, and Fernando Limongi. 1997. “[Modernization: Theories and Facts.](#)” *World Politics*, 49(2): 155-183.

Optional readings:

- Huntington, Samuel P. 2006. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. Yale University Press.
- Przeworski, Adam, et al. 2000. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*. Cambridge University Press.
- Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, James A. Robinson, and Pierre Yared. 2008. “[Income and Democracy.](#)” *American Economic Review*, 98(3): 808-842.
- Treisman, Daniel. 2015. “[Income, Democracy, and Leader Turnover.](#)” *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(4): 927-942.
- Cervellati, Matteo, Florian Jung, Uwe Sunde, and Thomas Vischer. 2014. “[Income and Democracy: Comment.](#)” *American Economic Review*, 104(2): 707-719.

Week 11 (May 14): **Credible Commitment**

Required readings:

- North, Douglass C., and Barry R. Weingast. 1989. “[Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England.](#)” *The Journal of Economic History* 49(4): 803-832.
- Weingast, Barry R. 1995. “[The Economic Role of Political Institutions: Market-Preserving Federalism and Economic Development.](#)” *Journal of Law, Economics and*

Organization, 11: 1-31.

- Chen, Joy and Zhenhuan Lei and Xiuyu Li. 2026. “[Matriarch for the Patriarch: Female Regency, Two-Sided Commitment and Political Stability in Historical China.](#)” CQH Working Paper No. 0004.

Optional readings:

- Cai, Hongbin and Daniel Treisman. 2006. “[Did Government Decentralization Cause China’s Economic Miracle?](#)” *World Politics*, 58: 505-535.
- Cai, Hongbin, and Daniel Treisman. 2005. “[Does Competition for Capital Discipline Governments? Decentralization, Globalization, and Public Policy.](#)” *American Economic Review*, 95(3): 817-830.
- Montinola, Gabriella, Yingyi Qian and Barry R. Weingast. 1995. “[Federalism, Chinese Style: The Political Basis for Economic Success in China.](#)” *World Politics*, 48(1): 50-81.
- Jia, Ruixue, and Huihua Nie. 2017. “[Decentralization, Collusion, and Coal Mine Deaths.](#)” *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 99(1): 105-118.
- Rodden, Jonathan. 2006. *Hamilton’s Paradox: The Promise and Peril of Fiscal Federalism*. Cambridge University Press.

Week 12 (May 21): **Decentralization and Federalism**

Required readings:

- Malesky, Edmund J, Cuong Viet Nguyen, and Anh Tran. 2014. “[The Impact of Recentralization on Public Services: A Difference-in-Differences Analysis of the Abolition of Elected Councils in Vietnam.](#)” *American Political Science Review*, 108(1): 144-168.
- Beazer, Quintin H. 2015. “[Political Centralization and Economic Performance: Evidence from Russia.](#)” *The Journal of Politics*, 77(1): 128-145.
- Lei, Zhenhuan, and Yishuang Li. 2025. “[Making Local Courts Work: The Judicial Recentralization Reform and Local Protectionism in China.](#)” *The Journal of Politics* 87(4): 1573-1586.

Optional readings:

- Treisman, Daniel. 2007. *The Architecture of Government: Rethinking Political Decentralization*. Cambridge University Press. (Read Chapters 1 and 2)
- Dilip Mookherjee. 2015. “[Political Centralization.](#)” *Annual Review of Economics*, 7: 231-249.
- Li, Pei, Yi Lu, and Jin Wang. 2016. “[Does Flattening Government Improve Economic Performance? Evidence from China.](#)” *Journal of Development Economics*, 23: 18-37.
- Zhang, Bing, Xiaolan Chen, Huanxiu Guo. 2018. “[Does Central Supervision Enhance Local Environmental Enforcement? Quasi-Experimental Evidence from China.](#)” *Journal of Public Economics*, 164: 70-90.

- Paik, Christopher, and Jessica Vechbanyongratana. 2019. “Path to Centralization and Development: Evidence from Siam.” *World Politics*, 71(2): 289-331.
- Beazer, Quintin H., and Ora John Reuter. 2019. “Who Is to Blame? Political Centralization and Electoral Punishment under Authoritarianism.” *The Journal of Politics*, 81(2): 648-662.
- Bardhan, Pranab. 2002. “Decentralization of Governance and Development.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 16(4): 185-205.
- Fan, C. Simon, Chen Lin, Daniel Treisman. 2009. “Political Decentralization and Corruption: Evidence from around the World.” *Journal of Public Economics*, 93: 14-34.
- Cai, Hongbin, and Daniel Treisman. 2005. “Does Competition for Capital Discipline Governments? Decentralization, Globalization, and Public Policy.” *American Economic Review*, 95(3): 817-830.
- Jia, Ruixue, and Huihua Nie. 2017. “Decentralization, Collusion, and Coal Mine Deaths.” *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 99(1): 105-118.
- Wibbels, Erik. 2005. *Federalism and the Market: Intergovernmental Conflict and Economic Reform in the Developing World*. Cambridge University Press.

Week 13 (May 28): **Public Goods Provision**

Required readings:

- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, Alastair Smith, James D. Morrow, and Randolph M. Siverson. 2003. *The Logic of Political Survival*. MIT Press. (Read Chapters 1 and 2; Recommend reading Chapter 3 if you have game theory backgrounds.)
- Williams, Martin J. 2017. “The Political Economy of Unfinished Development Projects: Corruption, Clientelism, or Collective Choice?” *American Political Science Review*, 111(4): 705 - 723.
- Lei, Zhenhuan, and Junlong Zhou. 2020. “Private Returns to Public Investment: Political Career Incentives and Infrastructure Investment in China.” *The Journal of Politics*, 84(1): 455-469.

Optional readings:

- Ma, Xiao. 2022. *Localized Bargaining: The Political Economy of China’s High-Speed Railway Program*. Oxford University Press.
- Ujhelyi, Gergely. 2014. “Civil Service Rules and Policy Choices: Evidence from US State Governments.” *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 6(2): 338-80.
- Xu, Guo. 2018. “The Costs of Patronage: Evidence from the British Empire.” *American Economic Review*, 108(11): 3170–3198.
- Cornell, Agnes, Carl Henrik Knutsen, and Jan Teorell. 2020. “Bureaucracy and Growth.” *Comparative Political Studies*, 53(14): 2246-2282.
- Hassan, Mai. 2017. “The Strategic Shuffle: Ethnic Geography, the Internal Secu-

- riety Appa-ratus, and Elections in Kenya." *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(2): 382–395.
- Brierley, Sarah. 2021. "Combining Patronage and Merit in Public Sector Recruitment." *The Journal of Politics*, 83(1): 182-197.
 - Brierley, Sarah. 2020. "Unprincipled Principals: Co-opted Bureaucrats and Corruption in Ghana." *American Journal of Political Science*, 64(2): 209-222.
 - Bostashvili, David, and Gergely Ujhelyi. 2019. "Political Budget Cycles and the Civil Service: Evidence from Highway Spending in US States." *Journal of Public Economics*, 175: 17-28.
 - Evans, Peter, and James E. Rauch. 1995. "Bureaucracy and Growth: A Cross-National Analysis of the Effects of 'Weberian' State Structures on Economic Growth." *American Sociological Review*, 64(5): 748-765.

IV. PRESENTATION AND FINAL EXAM

Week 14 (June 4): **Students' Presentations**

Week 15 (June 11): **Students' Presentations and Final Review**

Week 16 (June 18): **Final Exam**